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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: SOUTH OSSETIA, PRESIDENT MA YING-JEOU'S
OVERSEAS TRIP

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused August 12 news coverage on Taiwan tennis player Lu Yen-hsun, who defeated six-seeded Andy Murray of Great Britain in the first round of the Olympic tennis match Monday; on President Ma Ying-jeou's first trip overseas and his transit stops in the United States; and on the results of the senior high school entrance exams island-wide.

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, a column in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" discussed the war in South Ossetia and called it a golden opportunity for Russia to restore its national prestige. A column in the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" also commented on the cause of the conflict between Georgia and Russia. The article said Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili misjudged the possible reactions of the United States and Western countries toward the conflict and has thus put Georgia in an embarrassing predicament. An editorial in the conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" said even with Russia's strong support, South Ossetia's independence does not assure peace and stability. With regard to President Ma Ying-jeou's first overseas trip to Paraguay and the Dominican Republic, an editorial in the pro-independence "Taiwan News" said Ma's "ultra-low-profile" transit in the United States will not benefit Taiwan's national dignity and visibility at all. End summary.

¶3. South Ossetia

A) "A Small War in Caucasus"

Columnist Antonio Chiang commented in his column in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 520,000] (8/12):

"... For the United States, Georgia is an important pawn in the Caspian Sea and in the Caucasus, while South Ossetia is located on a major route for energy source transportation. In order to prevent NATO from expanding eastward, Russia has been offering full support for this small country seeking independence, so that it can restrain Georgia easily. Even though Georgia was the home of Joseph Stalin, it has deep hatred of the former Soviet Union; as a result, it has become Georgia's only choice to tilt toward the United States. It is interesting, however, to note the public relations strategies adopted by the United States and Russia [toward this matter]. As it stands now, Washington's keynote position is to maintain the territorial integrity of Georgia, while Moscow said it supports the democratic principles of independence and freedom. Washington's and Moscow's positions on this matter are exactly opposite to their respective positions over Kosovo's independence. ...

"For Russia, this is a golden opportunity for it to restore its national prestige. The Caucasus, the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea are all important energy and strategic sites, on which Moscow will not allow Washington to encroach. But the war will not last long, or the ethnic and religious conflicts in the Caucasus will be rekindled again -- a development that will certainly put Russia in an unfavorable position. ..."

B) "Georgia's Misjudgment in Attacking South Ossetia"

The "International Lookout" column in the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 250,000] wrote (8/12):

".... The reason why Russia waged a war [against Georgia] on such a scale is to punish someone as a warning to others; it meant to make a statement to those former Soviet Union countries which tend to be attracted by the West that Georgia has committed something that violates Russia's interests, so Russia retaliated against it by use of force. [Russia also meant to warn] other countries such as Poland and Czech Republic that if they commit something beyond Russia's tolerance, it will use force against them as well. In the meantime, [Russia] is telling the West that it has special interests in the [Caucasus] region that must not be overlooked, the same way the United States does to Latin America. ..."

"What Georgia has anticipated is that in the wake of the war, with the intervention of the United States and the European Union, Russia, which has become a party in the conflict, will not be the peacekeeper [in the region] following the ceasefire. [Georgia also hopes that] it will be either NATO or the European Union that will maintain peace between Georgia and Russia, rather than having Russia maintain peace between Georgia and South Ossetia. Nevertheless, [Georgia] has overlooked the international status of Russia, which will certainly not tolerate seeing its status fall to such a condition. It may well be asked: which Western countries, particularly those in Europe, would be willing to take the risk of engaging in conflict with Russia directly by supporting a small country, whose interests they are not directly involved in? In what way are they going to support it? It will not work in the United Nations. Neither will NATO's intervention nor a boycott by the European Union will work."

OVERSEAS TRIP

C) "Caucasus Plagued by Wars"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (8/12):

"While the Games for Peace and Harmony were about to begin on Friday evening in Beijing, fighting erupted in the Caucasus between Georgian attackers and Russian defenders over control of the South Ossetia region in Georgia. ... Like Kosovo's independence from Serbia with strong U.S. support, South Ossetia's independence from Georgia with strong Russian support, does not assure peace and stability, not to mention prosperity, for its people and the region."

14. President Ma Ying-jeou's Overseas Trip

"Ma to Face First Diplomatic Test"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] editorialized (8/12):

".... Naturally, the attention of the Taiwan media will be riveted on the transit stops in the United States, especially since the KMT in opposition had claimed that tight restrictions imposed on Chen's activities in his transit stops were due to the DPP president's 'trouble-making' that had 'wrecked' trust between Washington and Taipei. Whether Ma will secure any more dignified transit treatment from Washington is open to question, especially since the dignity and visibility of his visit is sharply self-discounted by his arriving on scheduled commercial flights instead of on a national carrier special flight."

"The fact that Ma has already been mocked by some international media as 'the invisible president' is a sign that such ultra-low-profile arrangements may comfort Washington and Beijing but will not benefit Taiwan's own national dignity and visibility regardless of whom Ma meets or converses with in private in Los Angeles, Austin or San Francisco. In sum, whether Ma is able to retain ties with Paraguay and complete his first presidential excursion with dignity will be decisive for establishing his credibility as Taiwan's national leader at home and abroad."

YOUNG